

Andean Report by Antonio Avila

Walter Márquez defends assassins

Venezuela's Gnostic deputy has confirmed charges that he defends narco-terrorism, and is an enemy of the Church.

Speaking at a press conference in front of the Venezuelan Supreme Court Oct. 30, Venezuelan congressman Walter Márquez insisted that the terrorist bombing four days earlier of a jeep carrying five National Guardsmen was not the work of the Colombian National Liberation Army (ELN), but rather an operation on the part of military or military-linked circles to perpetuate a coverup of an alleged military massacre the previous year. Márquez clung to this coverup, despite the fact that the ELN—a Cuban-sponsored narco-terrorist band of cut-throats which had just murdered a Catholic bishop in Colombia—itself has already assumed full responsibility for the bombing!

Signing themselves the "Domingo Laín Sanz Front of the ELN," the terrorists sent a communiqué to the press immediately following the Oct. 26 bombing, claiming authorship of the murders, which, they declared, were revenge for the death of one of their guerrilla commanders at the hands of army troops one year earlier.

The secretary general of the Venezuelan Labor Party (PLV), Alejandro Peña, issued a statement Nov. 7, noting that Márquez's defense of the priest-killing ELN was not surprising, given the congressman's involvement with a Gnostic cult dedicated to the destruction of the Catholic Church. Márquez is a founder of the Universal Christian Gnostic Church in Venezuela, which in Colombia has well-documented links both to the terrorist M-19 and to the drug trade. Last year, Márquez conducted a tour together with fellow Gnostic Jairo Slebi, a Co-

lombian congressman whose visa has just been canceled by the U.S. State Department because of his links to the drug trade.

This was certainly not Márquez's first defense of narco-terrorists. In October 1988, members of a specialized elite counterinsurgent force known as the CEJAP killed 14 suspected terrorists in the border region known as El Amparo. Márquez not only flouted Venezuelan law at the time by harboring two of the escaped terrorist suspects, but deliberately fostered anti-military sentiments by irresponsibly charging that the armed forces had murdered innocent fishermen instead of guerrillas, as the CEJAP claimed. His recent press conference in front of the Venezuelan Supreme Court was to demand that the Court re-open a trial against the military personnel allegedly responsible for the El Amparo deaths.

Congressman Alfredo Vethencourt Plaza, a spokesman for the Defense Commission of the Chamber of Deputies which is supposed to be investigating the murder of the five guardsmen, declared, "I believe that the information of the Armed Forces is correct, until proven contrary." However, Márquez still insists that claims of ELN authorship of the bombing are a lie. On Nov. 2, the daily *El Diario de Caracas* published a note saying that "Deputy Walter Márquez, in a debate in the lower House, argued that this operation of the Colombian guerrilla is false, because it was 'mounted' by those who would like to manipulate the consequences of the El Amparo massacre which oc-

curred in the region one year ago."

On Sept. 14, Colombia's IV Army Brigade command revealed that it had captured 28 ELN members who had been carrying out various terrorist actions in the area of Medellín, in collaboration with the cocaine-trafficking Medellín Cartel.

By covering for the ELN, says the PLV's Peña, Márquez is not only backing a narco-terrorist group, but also the assassins of Catholic bishops. In early October, the ELN first kidnaped, then murdered the bishop of Arauca, Monsignor Jesús Emilio Jaramillo Monsalve, according to a spokesman for the Second Division of the Colombian Army. On Oct. 3, peasants in Arauca—which is on the Colombian side of the border from El Amparo—found Monsignor Jaramillo's body, with two bullets through his head. The ELN admitted that it had kidnaped the bishop one day earlier, with the intention of using him as a message-bearer to Colombian President Barco.

Peña pointed out that in view of Márquez's latest defense of the ELN, the possibility of his winning a bid for governor of the border state of Táchira presents a serious threat to Venezuelan national security. Márquez's candidacy is backed by the Movement to Socialism (MAS) party, whose magazine *En el Ojo del Huracán* ("Eye of the Hurricane") just published an article by Colombian drug legalization advocate and novelist Gabriel García Márquez, in which he attacks the Colombian war on the drug trade and proposes a negotiated pact with the traffickers.

Venezuelan cattlemen and growers from the region bordering Colombia have also repeatedly accused deputy Márquez of defending the narco-terrorists who have been murdering, kidnaping, and rampaging on both sides of the border.